

Joseph Medill

Christine Buzard
Oregon High School, Oregon
Teacher: Sara Werckle

Joseph Medill was born in 1877 in New Burnswick, Canada. He grew up in Ohio and became a lawyer in his adult life. Medill later settled in Illinois. He bought a part of the *Chicago Tribune* with Charles Ray. They were staunch abolitionists and supported Abraham Lincoln strongly. Medill is important to history because he was the owner of a prestigious newspaper and a mayor.

Joseph Medill was raised in Ohio and mostly educated himself. He became a lawyer but disliked it and changed his career to journalism. He worked at several newspapers in Ohio in the early 1850s. According to historians, almost every town in those days supported “at least one newspaper and had at least two in competition,” according to historian Robert Howard. After gaining experience in the business, Medill moved to Illinois and bought a part of the *Chicago Tribune* with Charles Ray. Together they bought an interest in the paper in 1855 and gained controlling interest in 1874. Medill is best known for his accomplishments at the *Tribune* during Chicago’s time as a “thriving publishing center” as historian John Keiser called it. The *Tribune* became popular because of interesting publications such as the revised New Testament and the Keeley cure for alcoholism.

Medill was an abolitionist and supported Abraham Lincoln. He was one of the first members of the Republican Party, and is even credited for coining the term “Republican.” Medill was said to have tried to persuade Lincoln to issue the Emancipation Proclamation several months before Lincoln wanted to. Medill and his

partner at the *Tribune*, Charles Ray, wanted Lincoln to be nominated for the presidency and were said to be “ready to put the *Tribune* at Lincoln’s disposal.” Their paper actually did play a part in Lincoln’s nomination and election by publishing Lincoln’s speeches and propaganda.

Medill ran for mayor of Chicago as a Republican and was elected on the Republican Fireproof Ticket in the aftermath of the Great Chicago Fire. He served one term, from 1871 to 1874. One of his greatest accomplishments as mayor was helping to establish the Chicago Public Library. He also supported state regulation of the corrupted and misused Chicago grain elevators. However, Medill was not popular among Germans. In Chicago, Germans were the “most populous foreign-born element,” in historian Howard’s words. These problems were part of the reason he resigned and did not run for reelection.

Medill dominated the *Tribune* until his death in 1899 at his winter home in San Antonio, Texas. He had achieved many things in his life: he had educated himself, been a lawyer and editor/publisher, started a family, enlarged the *Chicago Tribune*, and ruled the city of Chicago. Medill’s two daughters had children that grew up to work in journalism and donated family land to the Girl Scouts organization to build Camp Medill McCormick in Stillman Valley, Illinois. His summer home, now called Cantigny, is a garden, picnic, and museum area for the U. S. Army. The Medill School of Journalism was founded at Northwestern University in 1921 and named after Joseph Medill. It is now one of the top journalism schools in the country.

Joseph Medill was an important figure in history. He is mostly remembered for his work at the *Chicago Tribune*. In his years there, Medill enlarged the circulation of the

Tribune greatly. Medill also served as the mayor of Chicago, although he was not very successful. He strongly supported Abraham Lincoln and the abolitionists, who won the Civil War and ended slavery. Medill should be remembered for his achievements in the United States. [From Peter Andrews, "How We Got Lincoln," *American Heritage*, November 1988; Robert P. Howard, *Illinois*; John H. Keiser, *Building for the Centuries: Illinois 1865-1898*; Peter C. Magrath, "Munn v. Illinois: A Foot in the Door." *American Heritage* February 1864: 88-92. "Joseph Medill Biography." Biography.com <<http://www.biography.com>> (Oct. 17, 2007); "Joseph Medill." <<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USACWmedill.htm>> (Oct. 17, 2007); and "Joseph Medill." Answers.com 1 Oct. 17, 2007.]